

HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Fiscal Year 2009

Membership:

James Wald (Chair)
Lynda Faye (Vice Chair and representative to Design Review Board)
Gai Carpenter (Clerk)
Lyle Denit (250th Committee representative)
Louis Greenbaum (CPAC representative)
Michael Hanke
Elizabeth Sharpe

Changes in membership:

Ms. Faye resigned her position in November 2008 because her new professional activity as a historic preservation consultant in the area could have constituted a conflict of interest.

Her seat remained unfilled, but Mr. Hanke assumed the position of Vice Chair, and Mr. Wald took over her position as representative to the Design Review Board.

Synopsis:

Last year's report explained in detail the systematic review and re-prioritization of our overall strategies and projects, which derive from the Amherst Preservation Plan (2005), many of whose key provisions are now also part of the new Master Plan. For that reason, we can present this year's work more briefly.

Last year, we enumerated several future goals, all but one derived from the immediate priorities of the Preservation Plan:

- Create a local historic district.
- Complete work on West Cemetery restoration and improvements.
- "Play a leading role in the 250th Anniversary of the Town."
- "Develop install, and maintain a system of signs and street furnishings to mark historic districts and village centers, and to encourage tourism"
- "Create a web page linked to the Town's website" to make available historic resources as well as information on programs and other events.

In this past fiscal year, we addressed or achieved all of these goals, with the exception of the one pertaining to the web site. As the Town's IT Department has now been engaged in the process of revamping the web site and related systems as a whole, we have for the time contented ourselves with updating content on our existing page but did not deem it practical to undertake a major redesign on our own at this time.

We met an additional goal posited in last year's plan, namely to begin restoration of the historic (1893) GAR tablets honoring our Civil War veterans.

* * *

Miscellaneous:

Before turning to our major planned activities, it is worth briefly noting continuation of some other forms of activity detailed in our earlier reports.

- Follow-up: We negotiated at length with the Amherst Woman's Club regarding a historic preservation restriction required in exchange for Community Preservation Act (CPA) money awarded last spring for repair of a historic carriage house. In the end, the Board decided that it was too hesitant to accept a restriction, and it therefore returned the grant.
- Work on the Town Hall masonry, funded as a multi-year project with CPA money, got underway in the summer of 2008.
- Actual restoration work on the most threatened headstones in the oldest part of historic West Cemetery was set to begin just as this fiscal year came to a close.
- In the fall, we officially endorsed a ballot measure that would have raised our CPA tax rate from 1.5 to the maximum 3 percent—this in order to ensure that we would be entitled to the maximum possible state match, which our neighboring communities, who are at 3 percent, already receive. Voters narrowly defeated the measure.
- We continued to consult regularly with Preserve UMass concerning the status of historic buildings on campus. In particular, we became involved in the process—part of the Memorandum of Understanding crafted by the Massachusetts Historical Commission in the wake of procedural violations in the demolition of a historic agricultural structure—of overseeing, with PUMA, the now-required survey of historic campus architecture and landscape by architectural and preservation consultants.
- We worked with the Design Review Board to ensure that Department of Public Works renovations of the Spring Street area, including the parking lot on the Common, could serve the needs of the various constituencies—e.g. abutters, drivers, pedestrians, and Farmers Market—without prejudice to the historic character and resources of the area.

Major Accomplishments and Activities:

- In the fall, acting upon the proposal from the Commission the Amherst Select Board, following Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 40, and the specific procedures established by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, created a Local Historic District Study Committee. A special category under Massachusetts law, and found in numerous locales elsewhere in the nation, local historic districts provide concrete protections for historic resources by requiring property owners to seek approval for any major permanent changes to structures visible from the public way. The preliminary phase involves researching and proposing a rationale and boundaries for such a district.
- We helped to celebrate the Town's past by collaborating with the 250th Committee and Amherst Historical Society and Museum in arranging a series of lectures corresponding to the monthly themes of the anniversary year.

We addressed the other priorities for this fiscal year - West Cemetery Work, historic signs, and other forms of marking the 250th anniversary - chiefly through our CPA requests. Indeed, we quite deliberately brought forward a record number of preservation proposals and expenditures: 11 of 12 items, totaling \$ 337,800.

- West Cemetery iron work (Town Tomb door and Dickinson and Cutler iron fences);
- Town Tomb reconstruction;
- West Cemetery landscape restoration;
- Kimball house payments (ongoing);
- Archival document (Town Clerk & Jones Library Special Collections; ongoing);
- Jones Library roof;
- Jones Library Special Collections HVAC engineering study;
- Conservation of 1893 Civil War Tablets;
- North Church (1826) roof repair;
- Historic signs (Writer's Walk);
- National Historic Register nominations; and
- Inventory of historic barns and outbuildings.

(The reader is referred for details to the explanatory material that we provided to Town Meeting.)

All but the North Church repair (\$7,000) passed. Although the use of CPA and other public money for church structures is common and has not been challenged in a court of law, some Town Meeting members expressed unease over using these funds for a religious property.

Two further words of explanation:

1) (a) Turning to the preservation of the West Cemetery landscape, in particular, represented our attempt to focus on an aspect of the Cemetery Preservation Plan that had hitherto not been addressed. Part of that plan calls for restoration of the 1730 Knoll area to a meadow-like state more in keeping with its original character and more sustainable by modern standards than a grass lawn.

In addition to seeking CPA funds, we have begun to partner with the UMass Stockbridge School fraternity Alpha Tau Gamma, which does many charitable works associated with gardens, tree work, and horticulture. Fraternity members arranged for contributions of both plant material and labor. We began with the planting of bulbs and other spring-flowering plants, which came into bloom just in time for Annual Town Meeting.

(b) In collaboration with the 250th Anniversary Committee, we helped to create a living celebration of Amherst History in West Cemetery in May. Residents studied the lives of and then portrayed historic figures—from the Tory parson of the Revolutionary era to African-American soldiers of the famed Massachusetts 54th—buried in the cemetery. It was among the most popular events of the season.

Both of these activities—as well as the inclusion of historic sights on the warrant review bus tour (which was also filmed, and disseminated by ACTV public access television on the airwaves and the web) no doubt helped citizens to understand and support these measures at Town Meeting.

2) The signs listed here are not general historic district or wayfaring signs—for we need to treat them in the context of a larger collaboration with the Town. Rather, they are a specific initiative for the 250th anniversary, intended to celebrate Amherst Writers' homes. They originated with a proposal from the Massachusetts Center for the Book, then officially located at Hampshire College. Among the goals of the Center is the promotion of cultural tourism, for example, by means of a Massachusetts literary map. In order to strengthen the collaboration between the Center, the College, and the Town, it was decided to have students research Amherst writers, starting with those listed on the map, in order to choose sites to mark and develop preliminary texts. Mr. Wald taught a course on local history and historic preservation, with emphasis on the cultural and literary history of the Town provided the framework for the research projects.

Future:

The gist of our re-prioritization planning was to focus on projects of high priority or opportunity: i.e. those representing urgent preservation needs or those of other levels of priority that could readily be accomplished (e.g. requests from community organizations, opportunities to obtain grants or matching funds, and the like).

We anticipate that most of our work in the coming year and perhaps beyond will be concerned with completion of major ongoing projects (such as the Cemetery restoration) and the new projects voted as part of this year's CPA appropriation.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Wald
Chair, Amherst Historical Commission

Handout on CPA projects presented at 2009 Town Meeting follows.

Amherst Historical Commission

2009 TOWN MEETING

ARTICLE 18 – FY 10 CPA HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROJECTS

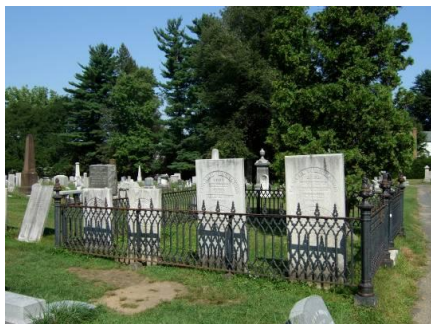
To develop CPA historic preservation projects for Amherst's 250th Anniversary, the Historical Commission built on nearly a decade of careful planning for such projects, including:

West Cemetery Preservation Plan (1999) - Past restoration efforts for Amherst's oldest and most historic place include:

- Designation of West Cemetery as one of the Commonwealth's "Ten Most Endangered Historic Resources" (1998)
- Listing of the cemetery on the National Register of Historic Places (1998)
- Development of the West Cemetery Preservation Plan (1998-1999)
- Installation of a new perimeter fence and restoration of the two gates (2000-2002)
- Funding for lighting and signs (2003-present—power for lighting just installed)
- Design and installation of a community history mural (2003-2005)
- Redesign of North Pleasant Street entrance (2005-present—entrance rebuilt as part of the North Pleasant streetscape improvements)
- Restoration of 250+ headstones in the oldest sections of the cemetery (2006-2009—to be completed this spring).

FY 10 West Cemetery Preservation

Historic Ironwork Restoration – \$25,000 will pay for: 1) restored fencing around the Dickinson family plot, 2) restoration/replacement of the badly-deteriorated Cutler plot fencing, and 3) a new historically-appropriate Town Tomb door.



1. Dickinson plot fencing



2. Cutler plot fencing



3. Town Tomb door

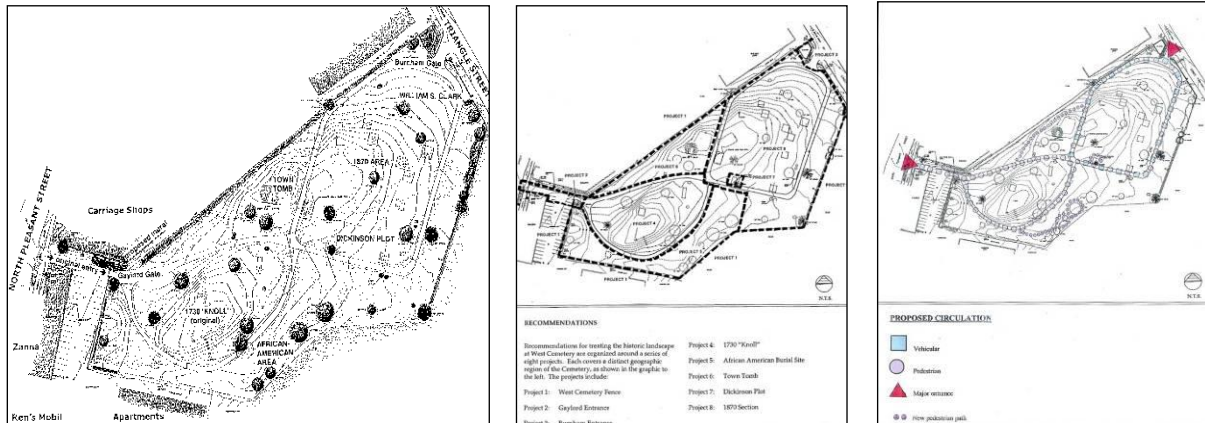
Town Tomb Reconstruction – \$30,000 will pay for: 1) labeling and disassembling this crumbling 1855 tomb, 2) new foundations, and 3) reassembling the tomb—including the large stone slab facing. Previously-appropriated CPA funds (\$5,000) will pay for the structural engineering needed. Replacement of the door and restoring the surrounding landscape should accompany this project.



The Town Tomb in West Cemetery



Landscape Restoration – \$20,000 will pay for restoration of historically-appropriate plantings to the three oldest sections of West Cemetery—the 1730 Knoll, the African-American section, and the Town Tomb area (map). Some plant materials and professional-quality labor can be donated, but several kinds of improvements are needed, including new trees, new walkways (paving), seating, and interpretive markers.



Conceptual Plans and Recommendations from the West Cemetery Preservation Plan



The African-American section of West Cemetery

Amherst Preservation Plan (2005) – Developed over two years with \$20,000 in CPA funds, the community-based Amherst Preservation Plan recommends a range of actions, including the preservation of high priority historic properties, both public and private, and a series of inventory and study projects necessary to allow direct preservation of important community resources.

FY 10 Historic Buildings & Material Preservation

Kimball House - \$25,600 is the third of five payments to the state for trading APR land for preservation of the pre-1815 Federal brick Kimball farmhouse at 575 North East Street.



The Kimball Farmhouse



Archival Materials - \$20,000 is the fourth of five investments in conserving and restoring historic documents, photos, and other materials housed in the Town Clerk and Jones Library Special Collections archives.



**Image of Grange Store delivery cart, ca 1910
before 1868
(digitalamherst.org)**



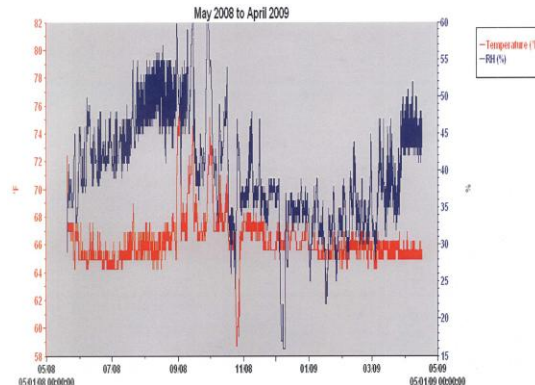
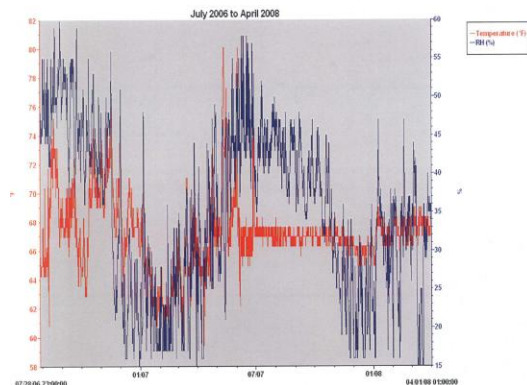
Amherst Academy and Parsons House,

Jones Library Roof - \$15,000 pays for analysis, development of the bid specifications required by state law, and emergency repairs for the leaking slate roof of this unique historic building.



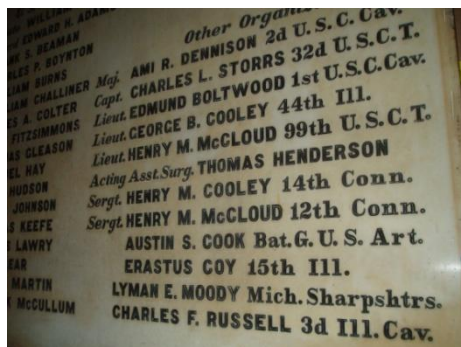
Jones Library Roof

Jones Library Special Collections HVAC - \$10,000 pays for analysis of the heating, cooling, and humidity needs of the three rooms in which Amherst's most important collection of historic documents is housed, for development of bid specifications, and for emergency interim climate control, if needed.



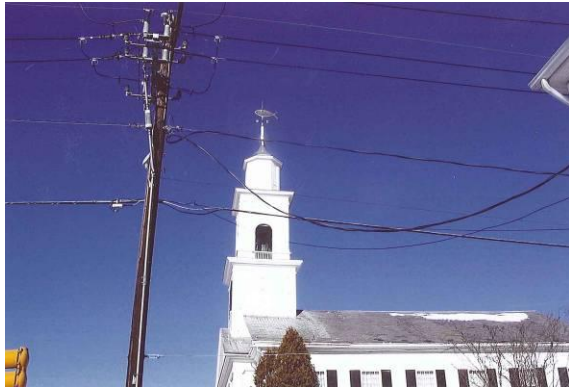
Temperature and Humidity in Special Collections

Civil War Tablets - \$65,000 pays for: 1) safely transporting, cleaning and conserving six (6) large marble tablets bearing the names of Amherst's Civil War soldiers, 2) for analyzing the structural integrity of potential display locations in Town Hall, 3) for design and bid specifications for display enclosures, and 4) for construction of enclosures and installation for two (2) of the six (6) tablets. Private fundraising or additional CPA funds will be sought to build enclosures and install the remaining six (6) tablets.



Civil War Tablets in storage at Ruxton

North Congregational Church Roof - \$7,000 pays for repair of a section of the slate roof of this 1826 community landmark, and a preservation agreement.



Roof of North Congregational Church

FY 10 Preservation Investments

“Develop, install, and maintain a system of signs and street furnishings to mark historic districts and village centers, and to encourage tourism.”

“Create walking tours for Amherst’s historic districts . . .”

[Amherst Preservation Plan, pp. 37-38]

“Writer’s Walk” Historic Signs - \$30,000 pays for a minimum of ten (1) permanent pedestrian signs marking a tour of the homes of historic Amherst writers—Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Robert Francis, Noah Webster, Helen Hunt Jackson, Eugene Field, Ray Stannard Baker [“David Grayson”], Howard & Lilian Garis, Mary Heaton Vorse, and others.



Emily Dickinson Homestead



**Frost and Francis pictured
on West Cemetery Mural**



Fort Juniper, home of Robert Francis

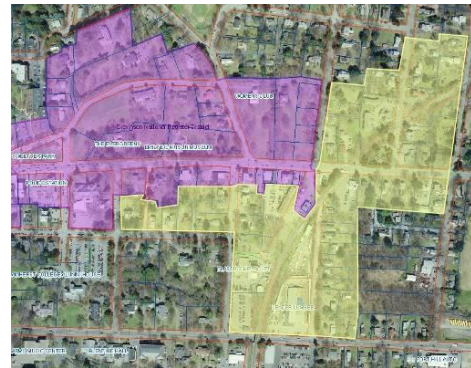
“Complete National Historic Register work [nominations] for . . . Railroad Depot Area . . . [and at least 15 other potential NHR districts].”

[Amherst Preservation Plan, pp. 36, 38- 39]

Historic Register Nomination - \$10,000 pays for MHC property inventory forms (w/ research and photos) and completed nomination packages sent to the state and National Park Service in order to: 1) expand the existing Dickinson NHR District, and 2) create a new Amherst Depot District highlighting Amherst's industrial past and nearby residential development.



Aaron Warner Jr. House, recently nominated



Potential expansion of Dickinson District and creation of Amherst Depot District (shown in yellow)

“Update the existing [Historic Resource] inventory by . . . completing [MHC] forms for the . . . landscapes and structures which were not included in previous efforts.”
[Amherst Preservation Plan, p. 36]

Historic Resource Inventory - \$15,000 pays for completed MHC structure inventory forms for all of Amherst's historic barns and outbuildings, which are disappearing to neglect, demolition, and inappropriate conversions. Once on Amherst's Historic Resource Inventory, permitting protections can be developed for these important structures.



Outbuilding in south Amherst



Historic barns in north Amherst